

FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

12-53 Orleans B, G EAS.112
LHD 1986, NR DIS 2001

Town/City: EASTHAM

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Old Town Center

Photograph



Address: 55 Salt Pond Road

Historic Name: Old Town Hall

Uses: Present: Single Family Dwelling House

Original: Civic – Town Hall

Date of Construction: 1851

Source: Town records

Style/Form: Greek Revival

Architect/Builder: Unknown / Seymour Bangs

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Granite

Wall/Trim: Wood shingles/ Wood

Roof: Asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Privy, pumphouse, 2 sheds (Photo 4)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

New windows (dates unknown)

Condition: Good

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.95 acres

Setting: This parcel is located on the east side of the State Highway across from the National Seashore Visitor Center. The surrounding area includes 18th and 19th century buildings that contribute to the Old Town Center National Register District. The main house is set close to the State Highway at the south end of the parcel. The parcel is open around the house with lawn. Mature trees and shrubbery along the street partially obscure the house from view.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Eric Dray, Preservation Consultant, for

Organization: Eastham Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): April 2025

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

EASTHAM

55 SALT POND ROAD

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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☐ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The former Old Town Hall, built in 1851, is an elegant example of the Greek Revival style. The Greek Revival style, popular from ca. 1825 to 1860, was inspired by then new Greek archeological discoveries, and employed temple forms and details for domestic American architecture. The form of this converted house consists of a 1½-story, gable-front main block with a one-story rear ell with shed roof. The house rests on a rough-cut granite foundation. The elevations are clad in wood shingles and there are broad cornerboards with recessed panels. The roof is clad in asphalt shingles (wood shingles originally), and it has a projecting molded box cornice with partial returns across the gable front and broad two-part frieze boards across the side elevations (intended to evoke the structure of a Greek temple that inspired the style). Two narrow stove chimneys rise through the roof ridge and a two-window shed dormer is located on the south roof slope. Fenestration includes replacement 1/1 double-hung sash. According to historic photographs and documents, the building originally had large 6/6, double-hung wooden sash; each pane measuring 9" x 12". Windows had louvered wooden shutters.

The front elevation has long been obscured by an enclosed porch, and the front elevation is currently not visible from the street (Photo 3), but there are good historic views of the Old Town Hall (see e.g. Photo 5). The front elevation had centered, double-leaf four-paneled doors framed by pilasters and triangular-shaped lintels. The entry opened into a vestibule with cloak room to the left and the town office to the right. The office was equipped with a safe and the scales used by the sealer of weights and measures. Another double-leaf door led into the auditorium which took up most of the interior. It was finished with matchboard wainscoting that rose 4'3" to a 4" molding, plastered walls, and a 10'6" concave ceiling. A platform, ascended by central and lateral stairs and protected by a walnut balustrade, was located on the rear wall. Heat was provided by a stove located to the left of the auditorium entrance. Lighting was provided by a kerosene chandelier and wall sconces.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

Incorporated as Nauset Plantation in 1646, and changed to Eastham in 1651, Eastham territory originally extended south to Pleasant Bay and north beyond Wellfleet Harbor. The early development pattern for what we now know as Eastham was impacted by its absence of deep-water harbor facilities. Relatively fertile soil led to dispersed agricultural settlement, but residential and commercial development was concentrated to the north at Wellfleet Harbor and to the south at Town Cove and Pleasant Bay. When the separate towns of Wellfleet and Orleans were created in the late-18th century, Eastham became and remained one of the least populated towns on the Cape throughout the 19th century.

In the 19th century, Eastham was the agricultural center of the Outer Cape. Crops evolved over time; corn and dairy were surpassed in the early-20th century by asparagus and turnips - two crops well suited for the sandy soil. In 1900, 58% of Eastham's workers were employed as farmers, but by 1930 that number had dwindled to 21%. Summer resort development, including cottage colonies and subdivisions of former farmland that would transform Eastham, had begun in earnest in the 1920s as middle-class access to car ownership increased and Cape roads were improved.

The Old Town Hall, built in 1851, is located within the Old Town Center National Register District. The building was built to serve as Eastham's first Town Hall. Before this hall was built, town meetings were held in Eastham's successive Congregational churches, and alternated between the Congregational and Methodists churches from 1821 to 1851. Eastham voters approved construction of a town hall in 1851, following a year of debate. Sylvanus Smith was charged with selecting the site, and Barnabas Doane (chairman), Elijah E. Knowles, and Myrick Clark were appointed to the building committee. The total cost of land and building was capped at \$1,200. The land was acquired from Knowles Doane, who lived in the ca. 1765 house that is now 25 Salt

Continuation sheet 1

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Pond Road (EAS.114). Seymour Bangs, a 44-year-old carpenter from North Eastham was selected as builder. He was probably assisted by his son John who was also a carpenter. Both are listed in the 1855 state census as carpenters.

In addition to official town meetings, the town hall was used by various private societies including the American Temperance Society and the Methodist Benevolent Sewing Circle. The town hall also served practical functions. For example, it was the recruitment site for Eastham's 77 Civil War soldiers, and prior to construction of the Nauset Life Saving Station, it served as a humane station where shipwrecked seamen were quartered and victims awaited identification. The town hall was twice used as a school, once from 1865-1873, and again in 1902-1908 for grades one through four following consolidation of the town's three ungraded schools. Eastham's Universalist Society was organized here on August 12, 1889 and used it as a place of worship until their own chapel was dedicated on January 29, 1890. The Eastham Grange was organized in the town hall on April 8, 1912. The building was also used for dramatic and musical performances put on by the Village Improvement Society and other groups.

After serving Eastham for sixty-two years as a center for civic, social, and cultural events, the town hall was sold at public auction on November 5, 1913. It was sold to Abbie (Abigail) F. Smart of Eastham for \$475.¹ Abigail (1863-1940) was the daughter of Eastham residents Barnabas Higgins Chipman and Sarah Mayo Chipman. She had married England-born John Hopes Smart (1859-1937) in Orleans in 1886. As of the 1900 census, they were residing in Brooklyn, NY and he was the Superintendent of a commercial cable company. By the 1910 census, however, he had retired, and they were living in Eastham. This house was inherited by one of their two daughters, Matilda S. Smart (1889-1985).

In 1980, a Conservator of Matilda Smart sold this property to Chester E. and June M. Ranlett of Hopkinton, MA.² Chester E. Ranlett was born in Lowell, graduated from Lowell High School in 1939, and then worked for a Pontiac Agency and the Boston and Main Railroad maintaining steam engines. In 1942, Chester enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was an aircraft and propeller expert on C-46 and C-47 transports in the Cairo, Egypt area of the war. Following his discharge in 1946, he joined the Massachusetts Department of Conservation in Stowe, MA. In 1967, he joined the Hopkinton Fire Department and maintained their equipment for fifteen years before retiring in 1982. He was an avid reader and collector of books and antiques. While living in Hopkinton, he helped restore at 1700 Grist Mill and black smith shop. After purchasing the Old Town Hall building in 1980, they moved to Eastham in 1983. He joined the Eastham Historical Society and became involved in many aspects of the society. He served for seventeen years as vice president. In 1989, Chester founded the Ranlett Tool museum donating much of his personal tool collection. He served as its curator until his death in 2008. The collection is housed in a ca. 1935 former garage behind the Knowles-Swift House at 2375 State Highway (EAS.AA). Chester also served on the Olde Town Center Historic District Commission for many years.

In 2009, June Ranlett sold the former Old Town Hall to two couples – Sharon M. Friesue-Schulz and Steven A. Schulz of Homer AL, and James L. and Lori K. McGrath of Eastham.³ In 2018, the Schulzes sold their share of the property to the McGraths.⁴

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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¹ Barnstable County Registry of Deeds, Book 330/ Page 190.

² Book 3179/ Page 14.

³ Book 23597/ Page 224.

⁴ Book 3187/ Page 36.

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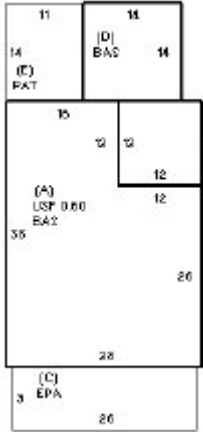


Figure 1. Assessor Sketch.



Photo 2. View from State Highway, looking south.



Photo 3. View from State Highway, looking west (1985 MHC Form B).



Photo 4. View of outbuildings, looking west.



Photo 5. Ca. 1860-1907 view of Old Town Hall (Eastham Historical Society).